

WHAT CHANGED

- The old guidelines recommended starting treatment if your T-cell count was 350 or less.
- The new guidelines recommend starting treatment if your T-cell count is 500 or below.
- The new guidelines also say you should consider treatment if your T-cell count is above 500.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

	NEW	OLD
500 CD4+ T-cells	Optional Recommended	Optional
350 CD4+ T-cells	Strongly Recommended	Recommended
200 CD4+ T-cells		Strongly Recommended
0 CD4+ T-cells		

TALK TO YOUR PROVIDER

The new HIV treatment guidelines recommend that most people with HIV should be on HIV medications.

This recommendation is a response to recent evidence that not treating HIV probably has a negative impact on health at all stages of infection. Newer HIV medications are more effective, have fewer side effects, and are easier to take.

If you're not taking HIV medications, and haven't talked to your HIV medical provider recently about when to start, now might be a good time to have that talk.

Your HIV medical provider is the best person to help you decide when is the right time for you to start HIV medications.

Public Health
Seattle & King County 

HIV/STD Program
www.kingcounty.gov/health/hiv
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HIV MEDICATIONS: WHEN TO START

On December 1, 2009 the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services updated its guidelines for when to start antiretroviral drug treatment (HIV medications). This brochure summarizes the new guidelines and discusses issues, questions, and concerns people living with HIV often have about when to start medications.

Public Health
Seattle & King County 

WHAT STAYED THE SAME

- ➔ **You should start HIV medications no matter what your T-cell count is if:**
 - ➔ You have had an AIDS related illness, such as Kaposi's sarcoma.
 - ➔ You are HIV positive and pregnant.
 - ➔ You are HIV positive and need treatment for Hepatitis B.
 - ➔ You have nephropathy (kidney disease) because of HIV.
- ➔ **No one knows exactly when is the best time to start HIV medications.**
- ➔ **Even if you feel healthy, you should talk to your HIV provider about a good time for you to start.**
- ➔ **If you decide to start HIV medications, you have to commit to taking the drugs as prescribed.**

STARTING HIV MEDICATIONS

Research shows that there are benefits to starting HIV medications if your T-cell count is **lower** than 500. There might also be benefits to starting meds if your T-cell count is **above** 500, but at this time no one knows for sure. These benefits may include:

- ➔ **Longer life**
- ➔ **Improved quality of life**
- ➔ **Preserved or repaired immune system**
- ➔ **Reduced chances of developing HIV related illnesses**
- ➔ **Reduced chances of giving HIV to someone else**

RISKS OF NOT TREATING HIV

In most people, if HIV is left untreated it will eventually destroy the immune system and lead to AIDS. There is also growing evidence that untreated HIV is associated with several health problems even for people with relatively high T-cell counts. Some of these problems are listed on the right:

- ➔ **Heart disease**
- ➔ **Kidney disease**
- ➔ **Liver disease**
- ➔ **Lymphoma (lymph node cancer)**
- ➔ **Other cancers**
- ➔ **Problems with thinking and memory**

CONCERNS ABOUT STARTING HIV MEDICATIONS

You might have a variety of concerns about starting HIV medications:

CONCERN	FACT
The drugs may cause unpleasant side effects.	Newer drugs for HIV have fewer and less severe side effects.
Taking HIV meds might be difficult and complicated.	Newer HIV medications are much simpler to take. Most people only need to take 1-4 pills once a day.
My virus might become resistant to the meds.	Your doctor should test your virus for resistance before starting you on HIV medications. Taking HIV meds as prescribed will reduce your chances of developing resistance.
There may be more important priorities in life at this moment than taking HIV medications.	If you've made an informed decision that now is not the best time to start taking meds, that's OK. Keep talking to your medical provider about when you would like to start.
There may be effective alternatives to antiretroviral drugs for the treatment of HIV.	Taking HIV medications doesn't mean that you can't also use alternative treatment. Antiretroviral drugs are the only scientifically proven effective treatment for HIV.
Taking HIV meds long term might be toxic.	The long term effects of taking HIV medications aren't fully understood. The new recommendations, which are based on what we know in 2010, suggest that for most people with HIV, it's better to be treated than not treated.
If I start taking HIV meds, will I have to take them for the rest of my life?	Although you will have to take HIV medications long term, you can stop if it isn't working or you're having serious side effects. There may be a limit to the number of times you can stop and re-start.
	TALK TO YOUR PROVIDER